

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
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FRANCE

JENNINGS: French officials have told Nicaragua that France is willing to work with other nations to clear Nicaragua's harbor of mines. Most reports say those mines were planted by guerrillas backed by the United States. The French say their offer is purely humanitarian. ABC's John Scali says that U.S. and French officials are now arguing over the offer.

SCALI: Nicaraguan authorities claim that in the past six weeks 11 vessels entering or leaving the harbors at Puerto Sandino and Corinto have been struck by mines laid by CIA-backed forces. Foreign ships that have been hit include those of Japan, the Netherlands, Panama and the Soviet Union. The State Department has brushed aside charges that the U.S. is secretly behind the mining. But today, a spokesman made it clear that top officials were far from happy at the unexpected French offer to help the Nicaraguans clear the mines. JOHN HUGHES (State Dept. Spokesman): We would not favor any nations contributing to Nicaragua's ability to export revolution with impunity. So, yes, we have raised our concerns with the, ah, French.

SCALI: The mounting controversy led Sen. Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, today, to urgently ask the CIA whether U.S. government funds were being used to finance the mining. High officials told ABC News that President Reagan had signed the directive last November 21, approving such funds to mine the Nicaraguan harbors. As part of the operation, a CIA mother ship has been directing high-powered speedboats and other crafts, manned by Nicaraguan and other Latin Americans. Behind the scenes, top administration officials are embarrassed and angry at the French for what they consider unjustified interference in a strategic area where the U.S. has vital interest. In a formal note, Paris has been put on notice that if the French go through with their offer it will create serious tensions in French-American relations.
John Scali, ABC News, Washington.